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Chairman: Mr. de Rojas ..... (Venezuela)

Contents

Agenda item 98: Environment and sustainable development

(b) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa

(d) International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

Agenda item 100: Training and research: United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Agenda item 95: Macroeconomic policy questions

(b) Trade and development

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 98: Environment and sustainable development (A/52/25, 112, A/52/217-S/1997/507, A/52/284, 318, 347, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/460 and A/52/514-S/1997/815)

(b) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (A/52/549)

(d) International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/52/413, 560 and 561)

1. **Mr. Don Nanjira** (World Meteorological Organization (WMO)) said that the long experience of WMO in battling drought and desertification had been reinforced by the adoption in 1978 of a plan of action on the meteorological and hydrological aspects of that struggle, with updates in 1990 and again in 1992. In implementing chapter 12 of Agenda 21, WMO collaborated with agencies like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in promoting food production through the application of agro-meteorological methods to improve land use, crop selection and management practices. WMO also worked with regional mechanisms to formulate strategies on freshwater resources and to provide technical and scientific support and advice, especially in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the northern Mediterranean region and Africa. In Africa, WMO was providing strong support for anti-drought programmes. In addition, it actively participated in the implementation of the goals of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and would continue to cooperate with other agencies of the United Nations system and with Member States in implementing the decisions and recommendations of the Yokohama Conference.

2. In many respects, the Yokohama Conference had been unique. Governments had fully realized the growing severity of natural disasters, and that awareness had facilitated their making a political commitment and supporting concerted action to contain natural disasters and prevent loss of life and devastation through preparedness and prevention. Natural phenomena paid no heed to the niceties of negotiations between countries; they did not discriminate and knew no borders; they did not differentiate between rich and poor, old and young; they did not distinguish between developed and developing countries. One needed only recall the devastating events in Montserrat, Colombia, Mexico City, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Poland, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Chicago and California to be convinced of the imperative need for the world community to act concertedly in order to prevent and reduce the devastating impact of calamities. Discussions should focus on ways of reducing the destructive effects on national economies, especially of the most vulnerable Member States, because disasters could retard or destroy sustainable development.

3. Bearing in mind the conclusions of the Yokohama Conference, General Assembly resolutions 50/117, 51/185 and S-19/2 and the relevant Economic and Social Council resolutions, a number of important steps had to be taken, the most essential being those having to do with the interconnection between disasters, development and the environment; the reduction of the risks and consequences of technological disasters like the Chernobyl disaster; the implementation of the objectives of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction; and the preparations for the end of the Decade.

4. **Mr. Filipi Balestra** (San Marino) said that closer cooperation should be established between the private and the public sector to improve the capability for disaster prevention and reduction, develop scientific knowledge and find practical solutions to mitigate the effects of natural disasters. San Marino had established a Centre for Disaster Medicine, under the aegis of the Council of Europe and the World Health Organization (WHO), which aimed to promote the prevention and mitigation of the effects of natural and technological disasters through research, training and international cooperation. There was a permanent mechanism for joint action with various international organizations, so as to provide humanitarian and scientific assistance for disaster relief efforts. The Centre trained medical personnel, nurses, volunteers, and individuals involved in emergency situations. In recent years, the Centre had devoted special attention to refugee relief activities, in close cooperation with the international agencies in the field. San Marino was particularly interested in expanding cooperation between the Centre and other United Nations organs, in the interests of avoiding overlapping and a waste of funds and obtaining better results.

5. **Ms. Weill-Hallé** (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that the work of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification had been a decisive step towards building a global coalition to arrest and if possible reverse the land degradation that threatened the dry zones of the planet. The sustainable development of dryland agriculture was assuming greater urgency in the light of the need to feed an ever-larger population. Ways must be found of increasing food production while reducing land degradation. An important dimension of that challenge was the concentration

of poverty in degraded dry lands and in the resource-poor households that lacked access to productive goods. From that perspective, combating desertification and drought must be understood as a global problem calling for policy and institutional changes at the national level and specific solutions at the local level.

6. The implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification presupposed an enabling framework that would facilitate a more holistic approach involving the partnership of all those who had a stake in it. The principle of partnership was one of the most important features of the Convention, as was the mobilization of significant amounts of financial resources, not in the form of aid but in terms of partnership arrangements. To achieve that goal, the Global Mechanism established under the Convention must be a catalyst and an effective promoter for financial opportunities for sustainable dryland development. It was expected that the Global Mechanism would also help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing resource flows. Through the partnerships it would foster, the Mechanism would ensure a better use of domestic resources and private-sector initiatives and would allow grants, concessional loans and other types of external financing to be combined.

7. Since its inception, IFAD had committed over $3 billion for programmes in dryland areas. The Fund had strongly supported urgent action in Africa and interim action in other regions. In the period between the adoption of the Convention and the first session of the Conference of the Parties, the Fund had committed more than $600 million to those activities. IFAD would continue to support the national, subregional and regional action programmes provided for in the Convention. As the organization housing the Global Mechanism, the Fund was committed to performing the functions approved by the Conference of the Parties so as to increase the amount of funding available to implement the Convention. The Conference of the Parties had endorsed collaborative institutional arrangements between IFAD, UNDP and the World Bank in support of the Mechanism. The three agencies had already taken action towards the establishment of a coordination committee.

8. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) endorsed the comments made by the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77, and by Benin on behalf of the Group of African States, under agenda item 98 (b), and said that the first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification represented a significant step forward in the international community's efforts to tackle the obstacles to sustainable development. He expressed his delegation's gratitude to the Government of Italy, the host for the Conference, and said that Senegal would be pleased to welcome the second Conference of the Parties, to be held the following year.

9. At the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, held in June 1997, the fundamental importance and necessity of international cooperation to combat desertification and alleviate the impact of drought had been recognized. Desertification and drought were problems with a worldwide impact, making it necessary to find global solutions, based on a spirit of solidarity and joint, if separate, responsibilities. In that regard Senegal noted with satisfaction that 113 States were now parties to the Convention, and urged those States which had not yet done so to accede to that important instrument.

10. Regarding the outcome of the Rome Conference, Senegal welcomed in particular the consensus reached on the delicate issue of the Global Mechanism. Designation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the seat of the Mechanism and the anticipated collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank would allow that essential Convention instrument to fully discharge its function of mobilizing and allocating the resources needed to implement the Convention. Further, the agreements reached on administrative, financial and budgetary provisions would contribute to the functioning of the various support organs under the Convention.

11. His delegation trusted that the questions which had remained outstanding at Rome, particularly those relating to the rules of procedures of the Conference of the Parties and the mechanism for assessing implementation of the Convention, would be resolved quickly and satisfactorily. Notwithstanding the progress made, for all the Convention objectives to be attained it was necessary for countries to adopt bold policies for the rational management of natural resources, poverty alleviation and improvement in agricultural methods. It was essential for all interested parties, in particular farmers, women, rural communities and non-governmental organizations, to be involved in that process.

12. In many developing countries the lack of resources remained a major obstacle to compliance with commitments; thus, national activities must be supported by genuine international cooperation; it should not be forgotten that environmental degradation, owing to its transboundary impact, was a problem affecting all.

13. Senegal would continue to carry out various activities relating to the Convention on the basis of a united and decentralized approach. In addition to establishing a national

coordination body and formulating a national plan of action, special attention would be paid to increasing awareness among the parties concerned, in particular rural populations, the periodic organization of national reafforestation campaigns, and the commemoration of a national day to combat desertification.

14. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its general debate on agenda items 98 (b) and (d).

Agenda Item 100: Training and research: United Nations Institute for Training and Research (A/52/367 and A/52/559)

15. **Mr. Hernández** (Coordinator, Joint Inspection Unit) introduced the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on training institutions in the United Nations system: programmes and activities (A/52/559). The report was in response to a request by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/188, and was essentially a supplement to a previous JIU report entitled "Feasibility study on the relocation of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to the Turin Centre" (JIU/REP/96/2). The Unit would have preferred to have met with the representatives of many, if not all, of the training institutions in the United Nations system, but owing to time and budgetary constraints had been compelled to concentrate on those institutions which it considered most important from the standpoint of their programmes, budgets and functions. Most of the institutions and organizations which had participated in the preparation of the report had expressed their full support for it and had endorsed its conclusions and recommendations.

16. To facilitate consideration of the report, an effort had been made to enumerate clearly and concisely the major problems impeding the effective functioning of the training institutions of the United Nations system, as indicated in the conclusions in the executive summary. It should be made clear that not all training institutions were affected by each and every one of those problems, although all suffered, to a greater or lesser extent, from inadequate coordination and exchange of information among themselves. Owing to their nature and complexity, some of the problems pointed out in the report were not the subject of a specific recommendation; nevertheless, the proposed recommendations would help to solve them.

17. The aim of the first recommendation was to strengthen the efficiency of the United Nations system training activities through the division of labour among the main competent institutions. The Unit had endeavoured to determine which institutions were most suitable for carrying out those activities. The wording of the recommendation had been the result of a long and sometimes arduous consultation process. The second and possibly most important recommendation dealt with a proposal to establish a coordinating consultative mechanism composed of the main training institutions: the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Staff College (UNSC) and the United Nations University (UNU). A review of the many bodies and agencies responsible for various aspects of training had led to the conclusion that none of them alone could efficiently coordinate activities. The mechanism proposed in the report had the clear and precise objective of strengthening the existing modalities for cooperation and coordination among the institutions. Although at first sight it might seem that the most important functions of the mechanism had been reserved for the main institutions, important roles had also been assigned to the remaining institutions, such as the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). Only the full support of all institutions participating in the work of the proposed mechanism could ensure the achievement of its objectives and the success of its work.

18. The third recommendation dealt with the preparation of an evaluation report on the use and impact of the activities of the training institutions, which should serve as the basis for enabling Member States to adopt policy decisions with a view to improving the efficiency of those activities in the United Nations system. The last recommendation dealt with the enhancement of the efficiency of training activities through their consolidation into a single item on the agendas of the legislative organs of the organizations of the system.

19. During its consideration of the question, the Joint Inspection Unit had noted that there was no agreement in the United Nations system on what was meant by "training" or "training institution"; in paragraphs 20 and 22 of its report, the Unit proposed concrete definitions of those terms. With regard to the preparation of the report, the Unit had gathered a great deal of material on the training institutions and their programmes and activities and on the question of training in general in the organizations of the system. Given the requirements of brevity and the rules limiting documentation, it had not been possible to include all that information in the report; however, a list of almost 100 training institutions of the United Nations system had been prepared and would soon be issued in an annex. A large part of the material gathered during consideration of the item dealt with the internal activities of staff training carried out by organizations of the system within the framework of human resources management or their technical cooperation programmes. However, in its report, the Unit had

concentrated mainly on the activities of the training institutions, while at the same time acknowledging the great importance that the question of training in general had for all the organizations of the system.

20. **Mr. Fernández Palacio** (Argentina), referring to the Secretary-General's report on the study of ways and means of cooperating with UNITAR (A/52/492), said that he agreed with what the Secretary-General had said in his programme for reform, and urged training and research bodies of the United Nations system to increase contacts with one another, as well as with the United Nations Secretariat, in order to enhance inter-agency cooperation and thus avoid duplication of activities. His delegation stressed in particular the Institute's initiative to establish cooperative links with institutions in the public and private sector outside the United Nations, which could provide a very useful different perspective. He hoped that the Secretary-General's next report would describe the measures that had been taken to strengthen that association.

21. Argentina also appreciated the information provided by the Secretary-General on programmes carried out with agencies of the United Nations system, such as the training programme to promote the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as the programme being implemented in cooperation with the States members of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety. Such cooperation within and outside the system would undoubtedly help avoid under-utilization of resources and would also make it possible to renew and update the work of United Nations training and research institutions on a permanent basis. At the same time, his delegation expressed its concern regarding contributions to UNITAR: the developing countries were the main contributors to the Institute and their contributions exceeded those of the industrialized countries; that uneven participation was not conducive to financial stability or to adequate planning.

22. With regard to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/52/559), his delegation agreed with the conclusions of the Inspectors that there was a need for coherent training strategies, more transparency and information and well-defined procedures for the submission of reports, and that the proliferation of institutions that in many cases carried out the same staff training activities should be avoided. His delegation also supported the objective contained in the Unit's first recommendation of entrusting UNITAR with clearing-house functions, in which capacity it would receive requests for training from Member States and secure the financial resources needed to carry out training programmes. The General Assembly's proposal to establish a consultative mechanism composed of UNITAR, UNU and UNSC, which would allow for an effective and flexible division of labour among those institutions, in cooperation with other training organizations, such as ICSC and the ACC machinery, was also interesting.

23. His delegation agreed with the Coordinator of the Joint Inspection Unit that institutional reform would be meaningless unless it took into account the other central aspect of the question, namely, the direction that the competent institutions gave to training per se. It was necessary to consider whether the concept of training as currently understood was useful, pertinent and adequate in the light of changing needs and the continuing challenges faced by the United Nations. For that reason, his delegation called for an exchange of ideas and an in-depth analysis of trends, with a view to adapting them, if necessary, to United Nations institutions in order to strengthen training and research programmes and activities.

24. **Ms. Álvarez** (Dominican Republic) said that the Joint Inspection Unit had submitted a very good report, and she commended the Unit's efforts to define United Nations training institutions and to prepare a complete list of such institutions. All that would improve the transparency of those institutions and strengthen coordination among them; it would also help avoid duplication and promote rational use of available resources. Given the importance of the training of the human resources of the United Nations system during the current period of permanent change, her delegation welcomed the attention that the report devoted to that matter.

25. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 100.

Agenda item 95: Macroeconomic policy questions (A/52/284, 347, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/460; A/C.2/52/4)

(b) Trade and development (*continued*) (A/52/15 (Parts I and II), A/52/329, 413 and 459)

26. **Mr. Guarani** (United States of America) noted the positive impact that the initial reform efforts made by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had had on development. The reforms were meant to ensure that UNCTAD could effectively serve as the focal point for the truly integrated treatment of development and interrelated issues. For example, the measures taken to streamline the organization of UNCTAD and to improve its overall efficiency had allowed the secretariat to propose a budget for the biennium 1998-1999 that was lower than that of the previous biennium. Efforts had also been undertaken to increase cooperation with the World Trade Organization

(WTO) and the International Trade Centre. UNCTAD must continue to make optimum use of its resources through collaborative efforts with other organizations, such as the regional economic commissions, and to thus avoid overlap and duplication of effort. Given its wealth of experience, UNCTAD could play a key role in helping individual countries build on their strengths to improve trade and investment performance. Developing countries were already reaping great benefits from globalization. Foreign direct investment in developing countries had topped $100 billion in 1996, which represented nearly 2 per cent of their gross domestic product. According to UNCTAD, foreign direct investment comprised a growing share of fixed capital investment even in countries with small economies. The volume of trade by developing countries had grown by 7 per cent in the previous year. In 1996, developing countries, including the low-income ones, had recorded their highest growth rates of the 1990s. Annual growth rate in sub-Saharan Africa had risen to 4 per cent in the last two years.

27. Despite those new opportunities, his delegation believed that no country could hope to take part in the process of globalization and economic development if it could not count on its principal resource: its own people. It was therefore necessary to have an educated and well-trained citizenry in order to achieve genuine development. That was why the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had indicated that basic education was one of its five fundamental goals for achieving sustainable development; during 1997, it would invest more than $100 million towards that end in developing countries around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. That was also why a law had been enacted in 1997 that banned the importation into the United States of goods made by forced or indentured child labour. Countries should prepare for the process of globalization by adopting sound social, economic and environmental measures. The United States was prepared to assist the international community, including the international financial institutions and UNCTAD, to facilitate that process.

28. As far as the report of the Secretary-General on economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries (A/52/459) was concerned, the United States of America regarded economic sanctions as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy. Economic sanctions were among a series of steps that could be taken to press for a change in unacceptable international behaviour. The United States firmly believed that sanctions were most effective when applied multilaterally. Whenever possible, his Government worked with other members of the global community to devise a collective response to behaviour that violated international norms or threatened international security, as it had done in the face of Iraq's armed aggression against its neighbour, Kuwait. In such cases, it must be made clear what policies the international community wanted to see changed and what the target State must do to have the sanctions lifted. Sanctions should also seek to target the subject Government, while avoiding to the greatest extent possible harm to the civilian population.

29. Other States shared that view. Since 1990, the Security Council had imposed sanctions on nine countries: Angola, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Rwanda, Serbia, Somalia and the Sudan. In recent weeks, the United Nations had further tightened sanctions against the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and against Iraq, and had imposed sanctions against the illegal junta in Sierra Leone. In considering such questions, it was important to remain firmly focused on the goal: changing unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour on the part of States and Governments. Sanctions were merely one of several tools available to effect that change; they were not an end in themselves.

30. Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's report characterized unilateral measures that might be taken by individual States, which in many cases were identical to the kinds of sanctions imposed multilaterally, as coercion. His delegation did not agree with that characterization. When important national interests or core values were at stake, the United States was within its sovereign rights to act unilaterally. It was within his country's sovereign rights to decide with whom it would trade, where it would invest and who was eligible for visas.

31. When the United States unilaterally applied sanctions, it tried to the greatest extent possible to ensure that they did not affect the civilian population, who were usually unable to influence and were often themselves the victims of the objectionable policies of their own Government. For example, although a complete trade embargo had been imposed against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the United States was also one of the largest contributors of humanitarian assistance to that country. It should also be borne in mind that, when the United States imposed economic sanctions against a country, it was also adversely affected. That the United States was willing to make such sacrifices indicated the great importance it attached to the issues involved.

32. **Mr. Aujali** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that unilateral sanctions were illegal, since the laws of a State did not apply outside its jurisdiction. Such sanctions were motivated by self-

serving concerns and a desire to dominate other countries. Coercive measures affected many parties, especially developing countries, but also developed countries that had invested in the target countries. As explicitly reflected in the Secretary-General's report, the international community had categorically rejected such measures. The United States should understand that such measures were based on fascist ideas. If the same standards were applied to all countries, the United States would first have to be punished for its aggression against the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in 1976.

33. **Mr. Rahamtalla** (Sudan) said that it had been revealed at a press conference given by the Department of State shortly after the United States Government had issued the executive order concerning economic sanctions against his country, that the blockade had been intended to bring pressure to bear on his Government even as peace talks were being held in Nairobi with the rebel movement. It should be noted that the peace talks had been held under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and on the basis of the 1994 Declaration of Principles, which his Government had already accepted. The Sudan had interpreted the acknowledgement by the United States Government of the real motives behind the sanctions as an expression of support for the rebel movement. The sanctions had conveyed the wrong message to one of the parties and had interfered with the talks, which had unfortunately been suspended before the desired goal had been achieved.

34. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 95 (b).

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.